

HISTORY HELP

Using Collaboration to Create Successful Programs

By Rachel Dickens, Education Programs Coordinator, North Carolina Museum of History

Collaboration may mean the difference between a successful museum program and a non-existent one. In our current environment of budget cuts and staffing overload, it has become even more important that cultural institutions collaborate in program planning and implementation.

Libraries, historic sites, and museums share an overlapping set of functions. Performing these functions though collaboration rather than in isolation creates a win-win for users and institutions. Here are a few ways that your institution can partner with other agencies to make your programming dollars go farther.

- Identify partner agencies. Contact other museums and historic sites to get ideas or discuss ways you can work together on projects and programs. Other agencies you may consider working with include libraries, arts councils, schools and universities, community groups, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, and churches. As an added bonus, these organizations may also be willing to help promote your site's events to their membership.
- Share ideas with other cultural agencies. Look through the Calendar of Events in the *Federation Bulletin* to see if another historic site is doing a program you'd like to try. Call their staff. See if you can brainstorm ideas to make their successful program work at your own location. Staff and volunteers at other

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cultural sites are often happy to help.

- Join an e-mail listserve of museum personnel to trade ideas and ask for advice. Some listserves to consider include those offered by Museum Ed (www.museum-ed.org), the North Carolina Museums Council (www.ncmuseums.org), or the N.C. Museum Educators Roundtable. You can ask for your name to be added to the NCMER discussion group by emailing bj.davis@ncdcr.gov.
- Take one of your favorite on-site programs to another location, such as a library, school, or community center. You'll attract a new audience, help promote your site, and help the library or school meet its educational goals.

At the North Carolina Museum of History, we partner with the Cameron Village Regional Library to offer a monthly program called History Corner. It's a history lesson and story-time for children ages 5 to 9. Museum staff develop the lesson based on an aspect of North Carolina history and use reproduction touch-items to teach the class. The children's

librarian selects a few story-books to accompany the lesson, reads one of the stories to the participants, and sends the children home with a reading list of other book titles for additional reading on the subject. We close with an activity such as a trip to the museum galleries, a craft, or a game.

This collaborative program with the public library has been very successful; we have a waiting list almost every month! The program, which meets monthly at both the library and the museum, covers a different topic each month. Since the program's inception in 2006, we've talked about fashion history, gingerbread and Moravians, pirates on the coast, quilts, and gold discovery, among many other topics.

- Trade spaces. Offer gallery space at your museum to a community group. For instance, this year marks the 100th anniversary of 4-H in North Carolina. A historic farm with museum space could partner with a local 4-H club to set up an exhibit focusing on the agricultural history of the area. You could also talk to a local

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library about putting up a small display about your museum in their lobby. Duke Homestead State Historic Site has worked with the Durham County Public Library to create a small exhibit in a lobby case at a downtown Durham branch. The North Carolina Museum of History currently has an exhibit at the new downtown Raleigh Convention Center. I've also seen great exhibits at airports while walking through the terminal.

- Read a book. Offer your museum as a location for a local book club to meet. Or participate in a community book reading by selecting a book that's relevant to your community, and publicize a book club through your libraries, museums, and schools. The Carnegie Museum of Art and Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh have a monthly program called "Bound Together Book Club." The staff selects a book related to an exhibition. The program begins with a 15-minute gallery talk highlighting the visual and literary connections. Participants are then able to converse with fellow readers and library staff in a casual museum setting.

There are many examples of community book clubs in North Carolina; the most successful example may be the "Together We Read" program. In its fifth year, Together We Read, is western North Carolina's region-wide reading and discussion program. Participants select a book, and programs based on the reading

are offered throughout 21 counties. For more information, go to <http://togetherweread.org>.

If you'd like help getting started on a reading program, contact the North Carolina Humanities Council for information on "Let's Talk About It"—a nine week reading and discussion series led by a new scholar each week. Museums can apply to the Humanities Council to order the books and pay the speaker honoraria.

- Combine your staffing resources and train across the board. Establish a partnership with another cultural agency—museum, library, university—and have joint training sessions for your staff and volunteers. When your museum has a large event or is short-staffed for other reasons, call on your friends at your sister agency. When I worked at Duke Homestead, I was also responsible for knowing the tour for Bennett Place and Historic Stagville, the three state historic sites in Durham. Once a year, I also had to brush up on my knowledge of Alamance Battleground and Aycock Birthplace for programs at those sites.
- Be a voice for other cultural institutions, and turn your museum into a tourism office. Learn about what other museums and sites are doing in your area so you can encourage visitors to spend more time in your county. Remember, tourism means big money in North Carolina, even when your admission is free!



Children's librarian Benjie Hester presents a story to the class during a History Corner lesson at the N.C. Museum of History.

- Use technology to your benefit. Link your website to other agencies for cross-promotion. If you have activities for families such as scavenger hunts or gallery guides, put those on-line so parents can download them before arriving at your site. Museums that are in close proximity to each other can create a scavenger hunt that encompasses both sites. Individuals who complete the entire hunt and visit both museums can receive a small prize from your gift shop.
- Offer workshops for teachers. Work with your county's central office to offer workshops that will earn CEU credits for teachers. The North Carolina Museum of History offers two summer institutes for public school teachers. The 2009 Summer Teacher Institute, "Happy Days are Here Again:

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The Great Depression and Recovery in North Carolina," was sponsored by the North Carolina Museum of History, North Carolina State Historic Sites, North Carolina State Archives, National History Day in North Carolina, and North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. During the four-day workshop, teachers were able to interact with speakers, participate in discussions, and try new hands-on activities. Teachers received resources, such as primary source materials on the Great Depression, to take back to the classroom. Participants who completed the institute received a certificate for thirty contact hours toward recertification in social studies.

The North Carolina Museum of History also partnered with the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County to offer the 2009 Arts Integration Institute. This workshop is designed to give elementary school teachers a hands-on opportunity to learn techniques

to invigorate their classroom presentations. In addition to giving tours and leading a workshop on creating exhibits in the classroom, museum educators picked up programming tips from the visiting artists.

- Get connected with volunteer agencies. Make sure that your local Junior League and college career centers are aware of your museum and your volunteer needs. The Junior League is committed to promoting volunteerism and improving communities.

Collaboration requires effective team work and a common goal. Two agencies with different missions will find it very difficult to collaborate; therefore the key to a successful partnership is selecting a good partner! It may take time to develop such a relationship, but when you succeed, both institutions and the visitor benefit!

Editor's Note: If you would like more information about the Museum of History's History Corner program



The N.C. Museum of History collaborated with the United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County to host a United Arts Council Arts Integration Institute for teachers. In this picture, museum staff member Susan Horton is helping teachers learn to make mounts for classroom exhibits.

or other collaborative programs, you can email Rachel Dickens at rachel.dickens@ncdcr.gov or call her at (919) 807-7969.

Apply to Become a Preserve America Steward

The Institute for Museum and Library Services encourages organizations with volunteer programs that focus on preserving our heritage to apply for designation as Preserve America Stewards. Preserve America Stewards receive a letter and certificate of recognition signed by First Lady Michelle Obama. Other benefits include authorization to use the Preserve America logo in public outreach and promotions, listing in an online Preserve America directory, and publicity in the Preserve America e-newsletter.

To be designated, applicants must demonstrate that their programs provide volunteers with opportunities

to contribute in direct and tangible ways to the preservation, protection, and promotion of historic properties; address an otherwise unfilled need in heritage preservation through the use of volunteer efforts; and demonstrate innovative and creative use of volunteer assistance in areas such as youth involvement, volunteer training, public education, and public/private partnerships.

Four application and designation cycles occur each year, with application deadlines on March 1, June 1, September 1, and December 1. For more information, visit www.preserveamerica.gov/stewards.html.